

**Maricopa County Planning and Development Department
Carefree Highway Scenic Corridor Update
September 12, 2006
Summary of 1st Public Meeting**

Location: Desert Mountain School – 35959 N. 7th Ave., Desert Hills AZ

Time: 5:30 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.

No. of Attendees: Approximately 65

Maricopa County Staff:

Darren Gerard (Deputy Director)	Maricopa County Planning & Development
Matt Holm (Principal Planner)	Maricopa County Planning & Development
John Verdugo (Senior Planner)	Maricopa County Planning & Development
Brian McCabe (Planner-Project Manager)	Maricopa County Planning & Development
Andy Piper (Planner-Project Manager)	Maricopa County Planning & Development
Jeff Clawson (Assistant Planner)	Maricopa County Planning & Development

1. Open House and Opening Remarks

During the first 15-20 minutes attendees signed in, picked up surveys and other handouts, and viewed maps showing an overview of the area, the existing and proposed scenic corridor boundaries, existing land use designations in the Carefree Highway Scenic Corridor Study, and a comparison of the design guidelines in the existing Carefree Highway Scenic Corridor study with other scenic corridor guidelines recently approved within the county.

Matt Holm began the meeting by welcoming the large group of residents, landowners, and other stakeholders and introducing Maricopa County Planning and Development staff. Special thanks were expressed to the Desert Mountain School staff for providing accommodations for the meeting. Matt briefly explained that it has been about ten years since the original Carefree Highway Scenic Corridor study was approved, which is the typical length of time for plans in the county to be updated. He also explained some of the unique circumstances regarding the Carefree Highway Scenic Corridor update. First, much of the existing Carefree Highway Scenic Corridor has been annexed by several municipalities, and the area that remains within the county's jurisdiction is now quite a bit smaller. Second, he noted that the area has changed quite a bit since the original plan was adopted, and it is necessary to reevaluate the plan to determine what needs to be changed, what needs to be updated, and what needs to stay the same. Also, he noted that the Carefree Highway Scenic Corridor, unlike other more recent scenic corridors approved by the county, contains a land use element. Therefore, two main issues will be reexamined in the update: the types of land uses that are appropriate, and the design criteria for new development. He then briefly explained the format of the meeting.

2. Presentation

Brian McCabe, Project Manager, gave a presentation explaining the history of the existing scenic corridor, the purpose of the update, the current and proposed boundaries of the scenic corridor, a general overview of issues addressed in the plan, the limitations of scenic corridor policies/guidelines, and a discussion of the existing land use plan.

In general, the following issues were included in the presentation:

- The existing Carefree Highway Scenic Corridor was established in 1997, and later included in the New River Area Plan
- There has been significant growth in the region, including master planned communities
- The update will include a reexamination of land uses and design guidelines
- A separate MCDOT study will address improvements within the right-of-way, while this study will focus on elements outside of the right-of-way, but the two studies will be coordinated on issues such as traffic access
- The existing plan covers the area from Lake Pleasant Rd. to Scottsdale Rd., but most of this land has been annexed by Phoenix, Cave Creek, Carefree, Scottsdale and Peoria
- The current boundary covers an area ¼ mi. on each side of the road, plus some adjacent hillside areas
- The proposed boundary will now be ¼ mi. on each side of the road, but only apply to the unincorporated areas from 7th Ave. to the 28th St. alignment
- Adjacent hillside areas will not be included, but are protected by policies contained in the New River Area Plan and the County's Comprehensive Plan
- The existing plan recommended design standards for elements such as screening, signs, building height, architectural design, lighting, setbacks, parking, utilities, and landscaping, all of which will be reexamined as part of this update
- The guidelines are policies, but not regulations, and do not prevent the sale or development of land, do not apply to existing development or future residential development outside of subdivisions, and do not designate historic sites or buildings
- The existing plan designates most of the corridor for rural residential land uses except for commercial nodes at the 7th St. and 24th St. intersections, and also discourages certain types of uses, all of which will be reevaluated as part of this update

Andy Piper, Project Manager, then gave a presentation discussing the types of design considerations that are typically addressed in scenic corridor plans. He gave general examples of these design considerations by showing photos that were taken in the area. However, he encouraged the attendees to identify additional issues both at the meeting and by completing and returning surveys. In general, the following issues were highlighted in the presentation:

- Types and amount of landscaping and vegetation
- Use and width of open space setbacks/buffers
- Building height restrictions
- Sign regulations (types, colors, materials, size, height, lighting)
- Architectural styles and controls
- Pedestrian connections and multi-use trails
- Shared driveways and access between parking areas
- Parking lot landscaping and lighting
- Screening of mechanical and electrical equipment
- Preservation of views by burying utility lines
- Trash enclosures that match the style of the principal building
- Fencing and walls that use natural materials and reflect the southwestern environment
- Preservation of wash corridors in their natural state

Before concluding the presentation, Andy also briefly summarized the planning process, and again stressed how important it was to get feedback from the public so that the scenic corridor update truly reflects the ideas and recommendations of the people who live and work in the area.

3. Discussion & Questions

The meeting was then opened up for comments and questions. The first questions raised were about a working group that planning staff met with on two earlier occasions in the year. Questions included how this group was selected, its membership, and what issues were discussed at the meetings? Andy explained that the group of about 10-12 property owners, business owners, and other stakeholders were intended to be a representative sample of those who live and work in the scenic corridor, and they initially helped staff decide whether the scope of the update should include a land use element or just the design guidelines, and also confirmed the new study boundary. However, Matt clarified that while helpful information was received from the group, no decisions about what issues should or shouldn't be included in the study had been made prior to tonight's meeting, which is the first step in the public participation process. He also added that the working group is a cross-section of people that can act as a sounding board for the broader community, but that it is an informal, unelected group and anyone is welcome to participate in it.

The next questions had to do with possible annexation of the area into neighboring municipalities, particularly as it relates to water and sewer service. Matt explained that because the county is not a utility provider, unincorporated areas are served either by private providers, or through agreements with other municipalities, but that it didn't necessarily mean the area will be annexed. He acknowledged that the provision of adequate infrastructure and services was an important issue, especially in regard to future urban growth and development. Another question was about how this study would be influenced by what other jurisdictions in the area are doing. Matt explained that regardless of the project, the county always tries to coordinate as much as possible with other municipalities, but that they may have different ideas and concepts than what the people in the county want, and we try to integrate the two if possible. He also clarified that planning staff is not aware of any pending annexation requests, and that it is really an issue for property owners and the cities to decide. Finally, meeting attendees wanted to know how other jurisdictions would treat the plan if it was later annexed. Matt said that it would be up to that municipality to make those determinations.

The next set of questions related to whether this plan will be meaningful. Matt explained that while the scenic corridor plan does not have the power of law, like the zoning ordinance for example, it is still a helpful decision-making tool as the planning process is implemented through public hearings. After discussing the roles of the Planning and Zoning Commission and Board of Supervisors in the decision-making process, he explained that it is important to get community consensus on what issues should be addressed, which is the primary reason for this meeting. He also explained that the update is designed to be a very public participation oriented process, and therefore staff not only sent letters notifying residents who live in the scenic corridor, but also placed an ad in the local newspaper to spread the word to as many people as possible. In response to a subsequent question, he also stated that a summary of the public participation process will be included in the updated scenic corridor document so decision-makers and the public in general will know what issues were raised and how much community consensus there was on these issues.

The discussion then turned to the issue of how much and what types of commercial development is found within the plan. Matt pointed out that the existing plan calls for two commercial nodes, but staff wants to get input from the audience about the types of land uses they would like to see. For example, is the existing land use element still a viable option? If not, then what are the alternatives? If so, then what in the existing plan needs to be changed? However, he clarified that outside the existing commercial nodes, the plan currently calls for rural residential, that zoning districts regulate the use of land, and that this policy document will not supersede existing zoning. One attendee expressed that while he doesn't want the corridor to look like Bell Rd., he would like to have more neighborhood commercial services nearby. Another question involved a pending proposal for a mini-storage facility in the corridor, and Matt briefly reviewed the Special Use Permit process and how this would be evaluated against the scenic corridor guidelines. He also referenced other area plans and scenic corridors in the county and explained that the extent to which they are followed is determined on a case-by-case basis. Using an example from another area plan the county adopted, he also highlighted the importance of identifying policies that can help give specific guidance on the appropriate types of land uses so that the plan can be crafted to the particular character desired by the community.

Another issue raised was the potential impact of a proposed wastewater treatment plant on development in the area. Matt noted that there is a policy in the existing plan that discourages commercial uses on septic systems, so if a sewer system was built then it could have an influence on the allowed uses in the area. He also stated that the county has a policy that urban type development requires adequate services and facilities, like water, sewer, and police/fire protection, as well as parks and libraries if residential.

One attendee commented about the need for additional signage for commercial development, and suggested it be in proportion to the square footage of the buildings. She also expressed that existing business owners are interested in responsible development along the corridor. Another person encouraged everyone to get involved in local groups, and expressed her desire to save what's left of the desert.

4. Issue Identification

In addition to the issues identified during the discussion session, 26 surveys were returned at the end of the meeting and two surveys were received the following week. Although other surveys may be forthcoming, the following is a list of the general issues and concerns identified to date (Note: the number in parentheses is how many times that issue was identified):

- No higher density residential development (20)
- Building heights should be limited (i.e. 30 ft. & 1 story) (16)
- Lighting restricted to low levels (i.e. International Dark-Sky Assoc. standards) (16)
- Provide landscaped setback along the highway (various widths from 20 ft. – 200 ft.) (16)
- Keep existing commercial nodes, but should be limited to community services (12)
- Preservation of the rural character of the area (11)
- None or very minimal commercial development (10)
- Restrict the types of commercial uses (e.g. no malls, car lots, manufacturing plants, big box stores, adult businesses, gas stations, drug stores, fast food restaurants, etc.) (10)
- Landscaping should be limited to low-water use, native desert plants (9)
- Preserve scenic views (8)
- Utility lines should be underground (8)

- Concerns about more traffic, crime, etc. if higher densities and commercial allowed (7)
- Architecture should be southwestern style and colors (7)
- Signs should be limited in size and type (7)
- Preserve as much native desert as possible (7)
- Minimize traffic access along the highway, use side streets for access instead (6)
- Signs should have minimal lighting (5)
- Higher density residential appropriate in some areas (i.e. 7th Ave. – 7th St.) (5)
- Low rise medical/dental facilities, banks, offices, etc. should be encouraged (5)
- Concerns over availability of water (5)
- Trash enclosures and utility structures should be hidden (4)
- Some variations in architectural design should be allowed to avoid monotonous look (4)
- Form design review committee to ensure the guidelines are being followed (4)
- Nodes unnecessary if neighborhood commercial allowed in reasonable sizes and locations along the corridor (3)
- Include all residents in process (not just businesses) & follow their recommendations (3)
- Parking areas should incorporate landscaping (3)
- Preserve washes (3)
- No development without sewer service (3)
- Commercial development should be allowed along the entire scenic corridor (3)
- Signs should use natural colors and landscaping (3)
- Use design guidelines from neighboring communities (i.e. N. Scottsdale) as example (2)
- Reduce dust/pollution (2)
- Support for New River/Desert Hills Community Assoc. recommendations (2)
- No commercial at 16th St. intersection (2)
- Encourage consistent and upscale architectural designs (2)
- Landscape the medians with desert plants (2)
- Design guidelines consistent with other jurisdictions so businesses can compete (2)
- Both native and other varieties of plants should be allowed (2)
- Minimize noise at commercial nodes (2)
- Light poles limited to 16 ft. height (2)
- Preserve wildlife habitat
- Pedestrian access should be encouraged
- Non-residential uses should be screened from view of houses using natural materials
- No open space setbacks
- No sign regulations or any other restrictions on rights of property owners
- Design guidelines shouldn't be too restrictive, or will have long drives for amenities
- Commercial nodes should be expanded to provide more neighborhood services
- Signs should be limited to 15 ft. height
- Signs should not be restricted, as long as they are attractive and consistent with the area
- Hardscaping (paving, roofs, sidewalks, etc.) limited to 40% on commercial properties
- Allow approximately 20% of area to be commercial or multi-family residential, with the rest rural
- Eliminate 24th St. node
- No fences or walls
- Landscaping should be maintained
- Fencing should be stucco/desert colors
- Build bridges over washes
- Discourage widening of the road, and encourage alternative regional roadways

- Additional traffic signals (i.e. 3rd St. intersection)
- Crosswalks at Central Ave., 10th St. and 12th St. for both pedestrians and equestrians
- Do not make any changes to the existing plan

In closing the meeting, Matt Holm thanked everyone for attending the meeting and again reminded them to complete and return their surveys. He also let people know that staff would put all the names on the sign-in sheet on an updated mailing list so they would be notified of the date for the next public meeting. He also announced that staff would be around for approximately 30 minutes after the meeting was adjourned to answer any questions and get additional feedback.

Contact Information

If you have any questions about this planning project, or would like to provide additional issues, comments, or recommendations, please contact Andy Piper or Brian McCabe at the following:

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